

2005 Mission Trip to Baja California, Mexico Highland-Augusta Mission Community

Sixty people representing 16 congregations traveled to Vicente Guerrero, Baja California, Mexico, July 24-30 under the sponsorship of Highland-Augusta Mission Community (HAMC) for the annual mission trip to build houses for Oaxacan Indians. This is the sixth straight year HAMC congregations have made the trip to a small but vibrant mission base 200 miles south of San Diego, CA. The team received generous support from HAMC; World Wide Ministries; Moffet Grant Fund; Synod of the Mid-Atlantic; and 18 congregations.

Team members made and paid for their own travel arrangements within the U.S., making their way to San Diego by plane and car over a period of several days. On Sunday morning, July 24, the team assembled in a hotel parking lot for roll call and prayer, and soon was loading into vans supplied by Youth With A Mission (YWAM, Chico, CA) for the 5-hour trek south of the border to the International Disciple Training (IDT) mission base. We were joined on the trip by two other small teams from northern California and Vancouver, BC, making a total of 72 people in camp for the week.

IDT is a small group of approximately 25 dedicated Canadian and Americans who work among the Oaxacan people in this agricultural community, spreading The Word and helping to provide basic needs, such as housing, clothing, food, and medical attention. The region is desert, but the climate is moderate due to the close proximity to the Pacific Ocean (two miles from the beach). Large corporate concerns have drilled deep wells to irrigate the fertile volcanic soils, and crops are grown year-round, necessitating huge labor forces. The Oaxacans relocate to this area from the southern-most Mexican province of Oaxaca to find work, but they also find a colder climate, sub-par wages, squalid living conditions, and no way to make the several-thousand-mile trip back to Oaxaca. Initially forced to live in labor camps owned by private landowners, they strive to earn enough to buy their own lot and build a house in a "colonia." Lots typically are approximately 30 feet by 40 feet, and they build their one-room houses out of sticks, flattened cardboard boxes, plastic bags or sheets, scrap lumber... anything they can scrounge. They have dirt floors, no plumbing, oftentimes no electricity, and no heat source. Water either is supplied by a water truck which fills open 55-gallon containers, or in some cases, a single spigot in the dirt yard (there is no grass). Cooking is done over open fires in the yard, or on small propane stoves. Most families have an outhouse, though some simply have an open hole in the yard.

This year our team worked in the colonia of Playas de Guerrero, building additions onto two existing homes and for the first time, we built two schoolhouses. After we arrived we also took on an additional project of painting, re-roofing and refurbishing an existing schoolhouse, and we added a concrete floor. All of the basic structures are the same: four walls, a roof, one door, a couple of small windows, and a concrete floor. For the first time this year, we built two-room houses 11 feet by 22 feet; there were approximately 15 team members on each build. The beauty

of these builds is that the projects can be built from start-to-finish during the week; teams get to leave knowing they did a complete project.

One addition was built for Mel Lopez and his family. Mel is the custodian at IDT, and along with his wife and three sons they lived together in a simple one-room house. They recently lost a nine-year-old daughter who suffered from a congenital heart condition that would be easily treatable in the U.S. Our team added a two-room addition onto their home, allowing the family much-needed space for additional beds.

Another addition was a “double build” for Pastor Armando and his family. Pastor Armando is supported by IDT and has congregations and churches in two different colonias in the area. He is a kind and generous man with a big smile who constantly grins and says “Hallelujah!” The addition allows his family more living space, and also allows him to meet with members of his congregation in a private setting when they have pastoral issues to discuss. The team also provided funds to allow Armando’s wife to have her baby in a hospital this fall, and to buy a portable heater for their home.

On each house build the teams built beds and other pieces of furniture; painted the houses; added additional windows; purchased used mattresses and other used pieces of furniture; did repair work on the existing houses; and took the families shopping for groceries, household items, and shoes and clothing.

This year we also built two small schoolhouses in Playas de Guerrero. The government will supply desks, chairs and other supplies, and IDT agreed to build the schools so that more children could attend. The two school-building teams also built storage cabinets for the teacher, and shelves and cubbies for the students. Money was left with the missionaries to fund a school uniform fund (the government requires students to have a uniform to attend school), and we have learned that to date, 35 children have received uniforms from our donation, allowing them to attend school.

The school teams also took on an additional project: to re-hab an existing schoolhouse on site in pitiful condition. Sometimes working at night, the team re-painted; provided funds for a concrete floor that has now been poured; built a new roof, and did other general repairs. The old schoolhouse now looks as good as new!

During the week we also had several opportunities for outreach and worship. We went to a labor camp; two rehabilitation centers; and two evening worship services. We prepared and served meals, made donations of money, clothing, toys and personal hygiene items, and always made new friends and spread the love of Jesus.

Because of the generosity of HAMC, Presbytery, and individual congregations and donors, after all was said and done at the end of the week, we still had nearly \$9,000 left in our general pool of funds. The team met briefly a couple of times during the week to discuss how these additional funds might be used, and the bulk of the money was divided among three needs:

\$5,000 was donated to help build a day care center currently under construction; \$1,355 was given to fund a school uniform fund; and \$1,355 was given to IDT to use in whatever manner they felt the need. We recently learned those funds were used to install carpeting in a staff office building currently under construction at IDT. A complete accounting of receipts and disbursements is attached to this report.

On our final night in Mexico, the team went to the nearby beach for a sunset campfire and worship service. There we gave thanks to the God who loves us all and celebrated Holy Communion as the cool wind whipped our faces and the waves crashed behind us.

We are grateful to all those who supported this trip through donations of money, goods, time, and talent. We all are aware that the greatest gift we gave and received during the week is the love of Jesus Christ, and all of us have returned changed forever.

Mac Sterrett
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